# The Loneliest Boy in Vienna: David Medalla at EXILE

The Viennese gallery EXILE concludes its 18 years with a banger.

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I just can't get myself to care about prints. Only rarely I do. It's not because of a preference for uniqueness over reproducibility. It's that most printing techniques lack the materiality of any other medium. The paint just presses itself onto the paper. Paint doesn't soak through, nor does it affect the paper, change its texture, or emboss it through the pressure. Everything gets reduced to a second-hand trace the resulting picture knows nothing of. It's without love.

A *printing block,* though, is a different story. It changes with every print made. Every scratch, every abrasion, every layer of ink. It keeps every touch. At EXILE's last exhibition *Matelot, Matelot* , I found wooden printing blocks mounted on the walls. Standing out, slightly angled. I was immediately intrigued.

As I came closer, I recognized faces on those blocks. Male faces, gently shaped by strokes so thin they could be spider webs and others as diluted as watercolor. Their gazes melancholic, absent, dreamy. They were timeless, removed from any binding reality other than nature. In one such picture, a young man offers an olive branch to a dove while resting his head on his broad arm. The dove, on the other hand, hasn't made up its mind yet on whether to accept this endearing gesture. The beige, brown, and grey gave the surfaces the impression of sepia, as if already fading memories. I was enchanted.

David Medalla, *Untitled*, 1959, zinc printing plate based on drawing mounted to wood

Francesca Gavin's text for this exhibition .

There was a vulnerability in those printing blocks that would have simply vanished in the print. Some zinc printing plates were fully intact while others appeared to have escaped as if molten off the wood. The material was much more immediate than when reduced to a mere pigment trace on paper. The wood, too, looked like it had been through a lot. I had a déjà vu back to school. Those blocks reminded me of our oldest ink, stained, scratched school benches we had. Those benches your hand would bruch over to stop at a carved-out insult — or a love confession.

These printing blocks have never come to be used except for one that's part of the exhibition. Nor have they been shown anywhere before. They didn't get to be titled, hidden away from the world for all those decades. There's something romantically tragic about it. The fact that those longing eyes never got to speak their desires out loud.

David Medalla, *Matelot, Matelot*, Installation view EXILE Vienna, 2026. Photo: Simon Veres

David Medalla: *Matelot, Matelot* was on view from September 11 to October 17, 2026, at EXILE as part of the *curated by* festival 2026.

**EXILE**

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Jennifer